Senior Leadership Team Meeting Hot Topics
Backgrounders for Bob Perciasepe's Visit to Region 9

Title: San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Estuary (Delta)

Background/Status:

- The Delta is crucial to California's economy yet there is a risk of potential catastrophe given that water supply infrastructure rests on a fragile network of levees.
- Freshwater drawn from the Delta supplies drinking water to 25 million residents[1], and irrigation water for $37.5 B agricultural sector[2].
- Earthquakes, floods, and sea level rise all pose a risk to the network of levees.
- Supplies of freshwater could be disrupted for years (no back-up plan exists).
- The Bay Delta Water Quality Control Plan (WQCP) administered by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) is the key regulatory tool for protecting water quality and beneficial uses in the Delta.
- EPA made strengthening the WQCP the top priority in our Bay Delta Action Plan.
- SWRCB's last comprehensive update of the WQCP was in 1995 in response to a rare promulgation of salinity standards by EPA. In 1991, EPA had disapproved SWRCB's salinity objectives and instead proposed using the "X2" developed by the San Francisco Estuary project. Ultimately, these standards were folded into the Bay Delta Accord of 1994, and EPA suspended its promulgation.
- The California Department of Water Resources is proposing to build new water supply infrastructure and restore ~65,000 acres of wetlands in the Delta under the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP). Agricultural and munipal water agencies are willing to pay for the construction of "twin tunnels" in exchange for building new water intakes at Freeport (just south of Sacramento) and increasing freshwater diversions. Funding for wetlands restoration would be dependent on ballot measures (environmental bonds).

Key Points:

- EPA leverages its unique tools under the CWA and NEPA to provide a unique perspective and valued expertise toward protecting water quality, restoring wetlands, and increasing the resiliency of ecosystems.
- The agency faces three major decision points over the next several years:
  (1) approval/disapproval of SWRCB's Bay Delta WQCP per CWA §303.
  (2) potentially adverse NEPA rating and potential CWA §404(q) elevation for the BDCP.
- We are working closely with technical staff and decision-makers at the SWRCB to build a strong, defensible, and approvable Bay Delta WQCP.
- We are working closely with proponents of the BDCP, scientists, and regulators to help ensure the project has a net positive effect on water quality and beneficial uses.

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[1] *Sustainable Water and Environmental Management in the California Bay-Delta*. 2012. National Academies Press http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=13394&page=1

[2] Agricultural Statistical Overview. 2011-2012. California Department of Food and Agriculture. http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/statistics/pdfs/AgStatOverview2011-12.pdf